

City Council approves soccer deal, with condition

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By ERIC ADAMS, kgw.com Staff

PORTLAND, Ore. -- Commissioner Dan Saltzman joined Mayor Sam Adams and Randy Leonard in supporting a deal to bring pro soccer to Portland on Wednesday. But Saltzman provided the vote on a condition.

Saltzman said urban renewal funds currently appropriated in the city proposal must be removed, leaving a \$15 million hole in the project.

The debate lasted most of Wednesday, with as many as 45 people lining up to testify on the project.



Mayor outlines soccer proposal

Commissioners Amanda Fritz and Nick Fish voted against the Major League Soccer proposal.

- [Mayor rallies soccer support](#)
- [Deal reportedly 'back on'](#)
- ['Straight Talk' with Merritt Paulson](#)
- [Soccer negotiations hit snag](#)

The mayor claimed the proposal would bring Portland "two stadiums for the price of one," since PGE Park would be reused for major league soccer, Portland State football and area high school football games.

"We are in the midst of the worst economy in recent history - this means job losses, tough program cuts, and drastic impacts on our homeless, youth and elderly. My vote today in Council was not about the merits of a stadium deal, but about protecting our dwindling public resources. The case simply hasn't been made to me that there is sufficient economic benefit in this deal," Fish said in a statement. "In this tough economy, we need a major league commitment to parks, affordable housing, jobs and education."

The report said an MLS franchise would also bring other "community benefits" with it, and that it would elevate Portland's international status at a time when the city aims to become the greenest urban economy in the U.S. **Details:** [Read the city proposal \(PDF\)](#)

But the proposal upped the city's financial obligations by about \$4 million. As recently as last Friday, Leonard told KGW it would cost about \$85 million to renovate PGE Park and build a new minor league baseball stadium in the Rose Quarter.

The report noted that the new \$89 million estimate could also increase after stadium designs and engineering plans were completed.

Under the proposal, Merritt Paulson and his family agreed to pay for the soccer franchise, about \$40 million. Paulson would be the team's owner; the team would pay to rent a renovated PGE Park from the city and those funds would be deposited in the Spectator Facilities Fund.

Bonds would be issued to cover the \$89 million and recouped through the Spectator Fund, under the proposal.

"The city will own both PGE Park and the new AAA baseball stadium, and the Beavers and new MLS franchise will lease stadiums from the city. These rent payments will help to finance the city's debt obligations," the proposal said.

The new minor league stadium would seat about 9,000 people at the site of Memorial Coliseum in Rose Quarter.

Paulson hailed the city's proposal, calling it a "good deal for the city and for taxpayers."

More: [Merritt Paulson statement on soccer proposal \(PDF\)](#)

Package crafted; political 'arm-twisting' left at City Hall

"If you are a worker, this creates jobs; if you are a taxpayer, this protects you from risk. If you are a fan, this means even better soccer and baseball ... If you love Portland, as I do, this revitalizes an area of the city ripe for renewal and showcases Portland to the nation and world," Paulson said.

The latest developments come after negotiations appeared to hit a major snag on Friday.

Three days later, sources tell KGW that a deal was brokered over the weekend.

In the deal, the Paulson family has reportedly agreed to personally guarantee to pay any cost overruns the city may accrue to convert PGE Park into a Major League Soccer stadium.

Currently, the Portland Timbers minor league soccer team and Portland Beavers minor league baseball team share the stadium.

The Paulson guarantee would also apply to construction costs toward a new baseball stadium for the Beavers.

Merritt Paulson, the man behind the soccer push, said it was a "great thing" for Portland.

"It's great for soccer fans; it's great for baseball fans ... it's great for the community and the economy," he said. "Hopefully, we'll have something to formally announce soon."

However, Paulson added that nothing was official until another vote was secured to back the deal.

Backers must convince one of three other city commissioners to support the proposal.

Late Monday, Commissioner Amanda Fritz told KGW that she was currently toward voting against the soccer plan, leaving two other commissioners, both of whom remained undecided.

Portland Mayor Sam Adams and City Commissioner Randy Leonard are reportedly on board with the plan.

"It lands Major League Soccer, keeps AAA team here but doesn't risk the city's general funds," Mayor Adams said. "It does not cut any existing funding."

Without a third vote the plan could not move forward and Major League Soccer would look elsewhere to award a new franchise.

The new minor league baseball stadium was reportedly to be located in the Rose Quarter.

A vote was scheduled for Wednesday, leaving two days for a little political arm-twisting.

KGW Reporter Randy Neves contributed to this report

Quest for ML Soccer

- [Soccer negotiations hit snag](#)
- [Task forces pushes ML soccer](#)
- [Soccer fans rally for new stadium](#)
- [Paulson plugs soccer on 'Straight Talk'](#)